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Google collects a frightening amount of data about you. You can find and delete it now

Google will auto-delete data -- for some users -- but only after a year and a half. You can do better than that. We'll show you how.

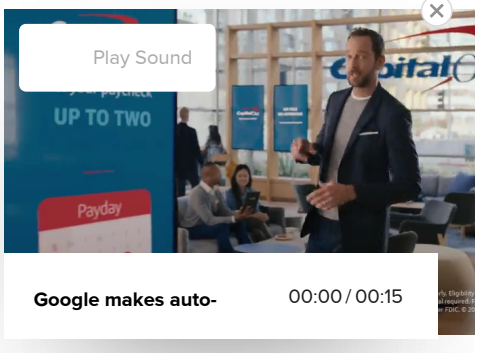
Dale Smith June 28, 2020 7:18 a.m. PT

LISTEN - 10:04

89

Google may have more data on you than you know, but you can limit how long the company holds onto that information by following these steps.
Angela Lang/CNET

Google might collect far more personal data about its users than you might even realize. The company records every search you perform and every YouTube video you watch. Whether you have an iPhone ($499 at Apple) or an Android, Google Maps logs everywhere you go, the route



Google makes auto- 00:00 / 00:15

Thankfully, there's something you can do about it.

Starting in June, new Google accounts will automatically delete private data for you. But only after 18 months by default. And only if you're a brand-new Google user. That's great if you're just now deciding to create a Gmail address or you just got your first Android phone, but if you're among the 1.5 billion people on Gmail or the 2.5 billion people using Android already, your account is set to hold onto your private data forever unless you tell Google otherwise.

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We're going to cut through all the clutter and show you how to access the private data Google has on you, as well as how to delete some or all of it. Then we're going to help you find the right balance between your privacy and the Google services you rely on by choosing settings that limit Google's access to your information without impairing your experience.

Now playing: Google makes auto-deleting a default, Boston votes to... 1:48

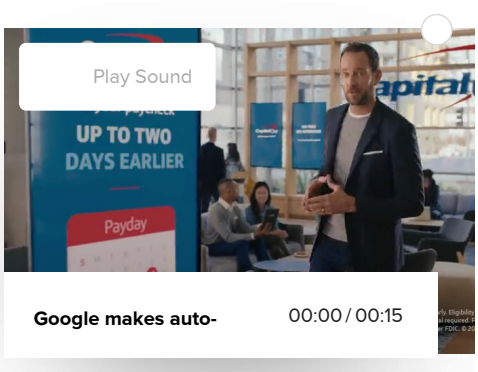
Find out what private information Google considers 'public'

Chances are, Google knows your name, your face, your birthday, gender, other email addresses you use, your password and phone number. Some of this is listed as public information (not your password, of course). Here's how to see what Google shares with the world about you.

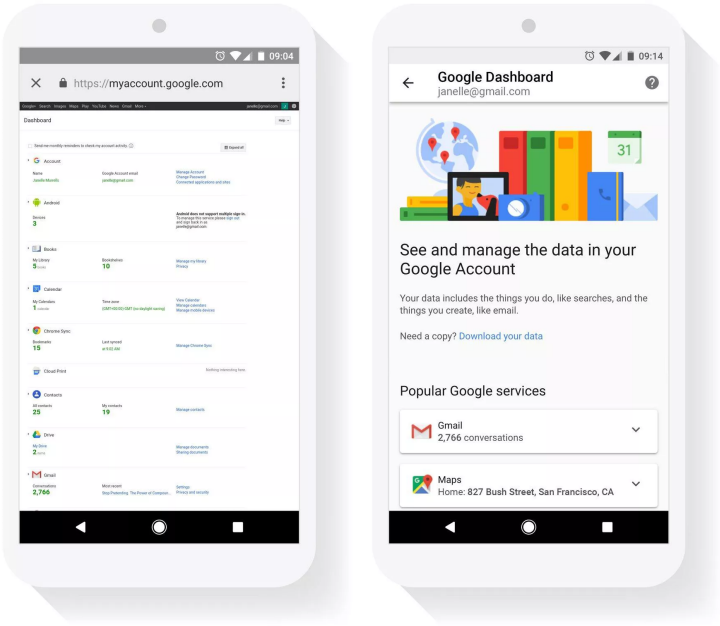
1. Open a browser window and navigate to your Google Account page.

2. Type your Google username (with or without "@gmail.com").

3. From the menu bar, choose **Personal info** and review the information. You can change or delete your photo, name, birthday, gender, password, other emails and phone number.



5. On this page, each line is labeled with either a **people icon** (visible to anyone), **office building icon** (only visible to your organization) or **lock icon** (visible only to you). Select an item to choose whether to make it public, semi-public or private. There's currently no way to make your account totally private.


https://myaccount.google.com
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janelle@gmail.com
See and manage the data in your Google Account
Your data includes the things you do, like searches, and the things you create, like email.
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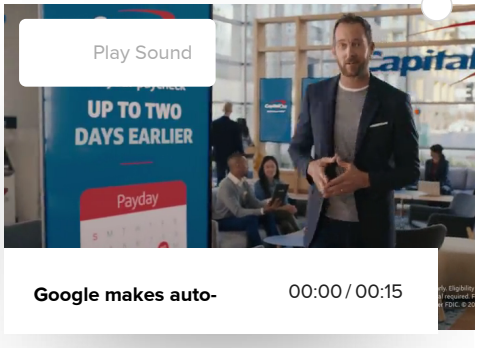
Google has adapted its privacy-control dashboard for mobile devices as well as desktop browsers.
Google

Take a look at Google's record of your online activity

If you want to see the motherlode of data Google has on you, follow these steps to find it, review it, delete it or set it to automatically delete after a period of time.

If your goal is to exert more control over your data but you still want Google services like search and maps to personalize your results, we recommend setting your data to auto-delete after three months. Otherwise, feel free to delete all your data and set Google to stop



1. Sign into your Google Account and choose **Data & Personalization** from the navigation bar.

2. To see a list of all your activity that Google has logged, scroll to **Activity controls** and select **Web & App Activity**. This is where all your Google searches, YouTube viewing history, Google Assistant commands and other interactions with Google apps and services get recorded.

3. To turn it completely off, move the toggle to the **off** position. But beware -- changing this setting will most likely make any Google Assistant devices you use, including Google Home and Google Nest smart speakers and displays, virtually unusable.

4. If you want Google to stop tracking just your Chrome browser history and activity from sites you sign into with your Google account, uncheck the first box. If you don't want Google to keep audio recordings of your interactions with Google Assistant, uncheck the second box. Otherwise, move on to step 5.

5. To set Google to automatically delete this kind of data either never or every three or 18 months, select **Auto-delete** and pick the time frame you feel most comfortable with. Google will immediately delete any current data older than the time frame you specify. For example, if you choose three months, any information older than three months will be deleted right away.

6. Once you choose an Auto-delete setting, a popup will appear and ask you to confirm. Select **Delete** or **Confirm.**

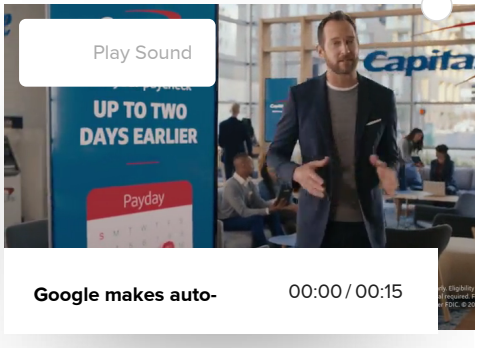
7. Next, click **Manage Activity**. This page displays all the information Google has collected on you from the activities mentioned in the previous steps, arranged by date, all the way back to the day you created your account or the last time you purged this list.

8. To delete specific days, select the **trash can icon** to the right of the day then choose **Got it**. To get more specific details or to delete individual items, select the **three stacked dots** icon beside the item then choose either **Delete** or **Details.**

9. If you'd rather delete part or all of your history manually, select the **three stacked dots icon** to the right of the search bar at the top of the page and choose **Delete activity by** then choose either **Last hour**, **Last day**, **All time** or **Custom range**.

10. To make sure your new settings took, head back to **Manage Activity** (step 4) and make sure whatever's there only goes back the three or 18 months you selected in step 5.

Watch this: Android 10 privacy settings: Everything to know ▶ 1:55



Google makes auto- 00:00 / 00:15

how often you check the Powerball numbers, the precision of Google's record of your whereabouts can be downright chilling, even if you never do anything you shouldn't.

If you're signed into Google Maps on a mobile device, Google's eyes are watching your every move. It's about enough to make you want to leave your phone at home. Thankfully, that's unnecessary. Here's how to access, manage and delete your Google location data:

1. Sign into your Google Account and choose **Data & Personalization** from the navigation bar.

2. To see a list of all your location data that Google has logged, scroll to **Activity controls** and select **Location History**.

3. If you want Google to stop tracking your location, turn off the toggle on this page.

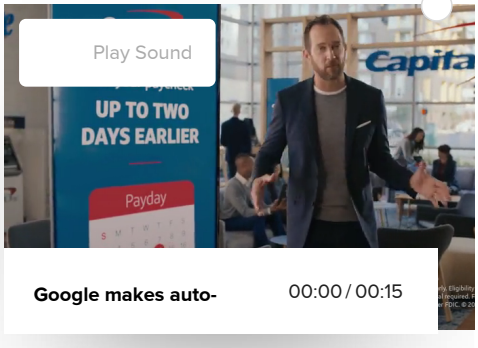
4. To set Google to automatically delete this kind of data either never or every three or 18 months, select **Auto-delete** then pick the time frame you feel most comfortable with. Google will delete any current data older than the time frame you specify. For example, if you choose three months, any information older than three months will be deleted immediately.

5. Once you choose an Auto-delete setting, a popup will appear and ask you to confirm. Select **Delete** or **Confirm.**

6. Next, click **Manage Activity**. This page displays all the location information Google has collected on you as a timeline and a map, including places you've visited, the route you took there and back, as well as frequency and dates of visits.

7. To permanently delete all location history, click on the **trash can icon** in the lower right corner and choose **Delete Location History** when prompted. To delete individual trips, select a dot on the map or a bar on the timeline, then, on the next page, click the **trash can icon** beside the date of the trip you want to delete.

8. To make sure your location data really disappeared, start over with **Activity Controls** in step 2, then after **Manage Activity** in step 4, make sure the timeline in the upper left corner is empty and there are no dots on the map indicating your previous locations.



YouTube saves your search history as well as a list of every video you've ever watched while signed into your Google account.

Angela Lang/CNET

Manage your YouTube search and watch history

benefit of all -- it helps YouTube figure out what kind of videos you like so it can dish out more of the type of content you'll enjoy.

Here's how to get a look at your YouTube history and, if you want, how to delete it, either manually or at three- or 18-month intervals. Just like with **Web & App Activity**, we recommend setting YouTube to purge your data every three months. That's just long enough that YouTube's recommendations will stay fresh, but doesn't leave a years-long trail of personal data lingering behind.

1. Sign into your Google Account and choose **Data & Personalization** from the navigation bar.

2. To see a list of all your YouTube data that Google has logged, scroll to **Activity controls** and select **YouTube History**.

3. If you want Google to stop tracking your YouTube search and viewing history entirely, turn off the toggle on this page. To stop Google from tracking either just the videos you watch or just your searches, uncheck the appropriate box.

4. To set Google to automatically delete your YouTube data either never or every three or 18 months, select **Auto-delete** and pick the time frame you feel most comfortable with. Google will delete any current data older than the time frame you specify. For example, if you choose three months, any information older than three months will be deleted immediately.

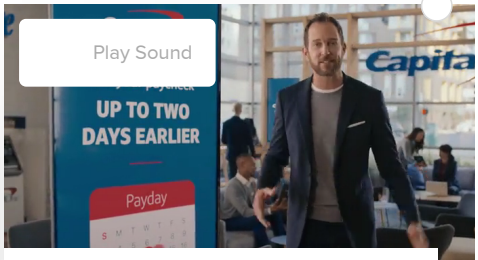
5. Once you choose an Auto-delete setting, a popup will appear and ask you to confirm. Select **Delete** or **Confirm.**

6. Next, click **Manage Activity**. This is where every search you make and every video you watch is listed.

7. To delete specific days, select the **trash can icon** to the right of the day then choose **Got it**. To get more specific details or to delete individual items, select the **three stacked dots** icon then choose either **Delete** or **Details.**

8. If you'd rather delete part or all of your history manually, select the **three stacked dots icon** to the right of the search bar at the top of the page and choose **Delete activity by** then choose either **Last hour**, **Last day**, **All time** or **Custom range**.

9. To make sure your YouTube data really disappeared, start over with **Activity Controls** in step 2, then after **Manage Activity** in step 4 make sure whatever's there (if you deleted it all there should be nothing) only goes back the three or 18 months you selected in step 5.



Google is adamant that no one at the company reads your Gmail unless you ask them to, but Google software continues to scan Gmail users' email for purchase

One more important thing about your privacy

Be forewarned, just because you set Google not to track your online or offline activity doesn't necessarily mean you've closed off your data to Google completely. Google has admitted it can track your physical location even if you turn off location services using information gathered from Wi-Fi and other wireless signals near your phone. Also, just like Facebook has been guilty of doing for years, Google doesn't even need you to be signed in to track you.

Not to mention, there are sometimes seeming contradictions between Google's statements on privacy issues. For example, Google has admitted to scanning your Gmail messages to compile a list of your purchases in spite of publicly declaring in a 2018 press release, "To be absolutely clear: no one at Google reads your Gmail, except in very specific cases where you ask us to and give consent, or where we need to for security purposes, such as investigating a bug or abuse." Perhaps by "no one" Google meant "no human," but in an age of increasingly powerful AI, such a distinction is moot.

The point is, it's ultimately up to you to protect yourself from invasive data practices. These eight smartphone apps can help manage your passwords and obscure your browser data, as well as attend to some other privacy-related tasks. If you have any Google Home smart speakers in your house, here's how to manage your privacy with Google Assistant.

First published on Oct. 23, 2019 at 5:00 a.m. PT.

89 COMMENTS

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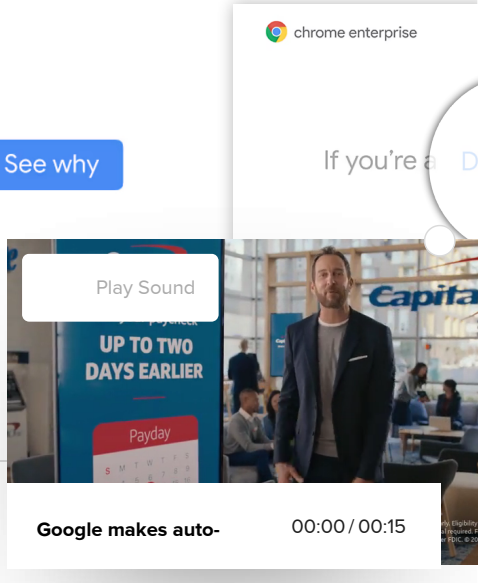

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